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INFO RHHMUNA/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHAP/AMEMBASSY APIA 0020
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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [NZ](#) [WS](#)
SUBJECT: Embassy Wellington: Samoa/New Zealand Situation Report

REF: EMAILS FROM POST TO DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS CENTER

11. (SBU) SUMMARY - On September 29, 2009, Embassy Wellington's Emergency Action Committee met to discuss the recent earthquake off the coast of Samoa and ensuing tsunamis in the region. Embassy Wellington remains in contact with Embassy Apia, providing support and communication assistance as appropriate. An up-to-date Situation Report for Embassy Apia begins in paragraph two (2). In relation to New Zealand, the EAC agreed to release an external and internal warden message urging people in low lying areas in New Zealand to move to higher ground as a precaution. Following the "All-Clear" announcement by the Government of New Zealand, the Charge d'Affaires ordered a resumption of normal operations throughout New Zealand. During the New Zealand tsunami warning, Embassy Wellington remained in contact with Consulate Auckland, the U.S. Antarctic Program in Christchurch, the Department's Operations Center, and DS Command Center. END SUMMARY

12. (SBU) Embassy Apia Situation Report (1500 hrs local) - All Chief of Mission and Peace Corps personnel are accounted for and uninjured. The Embassy just received the first report of an American casualty - a U.S. Citizen resident of Samoa reportedly drown. The Embassy is in contact with the next of kin located in Samoa. The Embassy has been monitoring local hospitals and found only one (1) injured American whose condition is not serious.

13. (SBU) Casualty numbers are growing rapidly. The National Hospital reports 17 casualties in the morgue and 20 more bodies in route from the south coast, with more casualties to be transported in additional vehicles. Of the 37 casualties reported, three are believed to be tourists; their nationalities have yet to be identified. There are at least another 50 persons reported missing and that number may increase dramatically. The hospitals around the country are also handling hundreds of cases of injured persons.

14. (SBU) Operations are now being run from the Embassy, housed in a commercial office building in Apia. The Embassy has power and appears to be undamaged by the events. An Embassy staff member has reached the heavily damaged southern coast of Samoa's Upolu Island. He reports significant damage - homes washed off foundations, cars strewn about, washed-out roads, and power lines down. The Samoan Government is moving to open roads with heavy equipment and restore power.

15. (SBU) Embassy Wellington will send a Political Officer, who holds a Consular commission, to Embassy Apia tomorrow, September 30

(in Samoa), to provide assistance with ACS work and reporting requirements. The Government of Samoa's (GOS) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has invited the Charge to attend a crisis assessment session at 1600 hrs (local).

16. (SBU) The MFA is meeting with the High Commissions of Australia and New Zealand concerning emergency assistance, including search and rescue resources. The GOS has not officially requested assistance from the United States, but informed the Embassy they may seek assistance depending on the outcome of the current meeting. Embassy Wellington's Defense Attach??? Office has already been in contact with Pacific Command (PACOM) in the event a request is made.

17. (SBU) Background: Wellington remained in touch with the Acting Charge d'Affaires in Apia who initially reported the earthquake produced unknown damage on the island and minor damage to the official residence. The earthquake occurred prior to the Embassy (Lock-and-Leave) opening, so no personnel were in the building. The Charge was in communication with the Peace Corps Director, and both were in the process of initiating their respective phone tree notification plans - accounting for all personnel and directing people to seek higher ground. The Charge's residence in Apia was designated the alternate Command Post as it is on high ground. In

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a subsequent call the Charge confirmed accountability of all personnel. Embassy Wellington continued to monitor the situation throughout the morning and relaying situation reports to the Department for Embassy Apia.

18. (SBU) New Zealand Situation Report - Following the 8.3 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Samoa early Wednesday (New Zealand time) morning, Post convened an Emergency Action Committee (EAC), chaired by the Charge d'Affaires, to discuss the situation in Samoa (Embassy Apia, Samoa is a constituent post supported by Embassy Wellington), and the tsunami warning issued by the Government of New Zealand (GNZ). The meeting included all available EAC members and the Consulate General in Auckland via conference call.

19. (SBU) The EAC decided to issue a Warden Message to the American public in New Zealand, advising a potential tsunami may be radiating across the South Pacific following the earthquake and urged people in low-lying areas to immediately seek higher ground as a precautionary measure. At the same time, the EAC agreed to initiate the passage of an internal message through the phone tree system advising both official and local staff as well as official family members of the situation and directing those in low lying areas to move to two designated sites on higher ground as a precaution. This message was passed to the U.S. Antarctic Program in Christchurch, NZ who also directed staff to higher ground. The Consulate General in Auckland, NZ moved operations to the Consulate General's residence, situated on higher ground, as a precaution as the commercial office building housing the Consulate is located near the harbor and the Consulate's alternate power source (generator) was located in the below-ground basement.

110. (SBU) The resulting tsunami that hit New Zealand was measured at 40cm. Once the tsunami threat diminished, the New Zealand Ministry of Civil Defense gave the "All-Clear" for the country at approximately 1230 hrs (local). Following this announcement, the Charge d'Affaires issued an order to resume normal operations throughout New Zealand.

¶11. (SBU) Embassy Wellington and Consulate Auckland are conducting after-action all-hands meetings with Mission personnel to discuss each post's reaction to events, solicit feedback on ways to improve, and express the importance of emergency preparedness.

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